5 Ways to Create an Environmentally Friendly Office



These actionable tips will bring you closer to a more mindful workplace that also saves you money.

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Take a stroll through any corporate headquarters or small-business office and you'll likely find a room with loud printers humming through reams of paper, trash cans packed with rejected documents and a break room stocked with single-use K-cups.

The impact our offices have on the planet is significant: Last year alone, we used more than 400 million metric tons of

paper. Even in the digital age, our paper usage is alarming. Paired with the costs of toner, energy and labor, this adds up for both the environment and your company's wallet. And the United Nations predicts that paper usage will rise by 50 percent.

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So what can businesses do to decrease their impact? It's time we embrace sustainable practices in the workplace.

What's an eco-friendly office?

Unlike conventional offices, green offices aim to reduce their carbon footprint while creating a more mindful environment for the people that inhabit the workspace.

Sustainable offices that meet a global set of sustainability criteria are LEED-certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). Whether or not you strive for LEED certification, builders can equip office spaces with energy-efficient walls, heat-efficient flooring and the latest in green lighting and fixtures. This can add costly upgrades in the beginning, but again, with energy-efficiency a priority, the true cost and environmental savings are fully realized over time.

Why should companies go green?

With up-front costs involved, it's easy to question why a company chooses to invest in an environmentally friendly office space. There are several reasons to convert to a green office space.

Green offices save companies money.

From a financial standpoint, there can be a hefty up-front investment when building a green office. Beyond that? The maintenance upkeep is surprisingly low. Not to mention the savings potential for heating and cooling, thanks to energy efficient walls and flooring. The individual savings might seem small, but in time, companies can recoup the startup cost of a green office. Energy-efficient light bulbs, one of the more common elements of a green office, are a great example of positive ROI (return on investment). While they cost more than their traditional incandescent counterpart, their energy savings can save roughly $45 per bulb.

Green offices make for happier workers.

Creating an energy-efficient office often results in more windows and increased natural light, better airflow and a more pleasant work environment. Studies have shown that green offices result in employees that are both happier and more productive. In fact, office workers with windows get 173 percent more exposure to white light during the work day and sleep an average of 46 extra minutes a night.

It’s a huge corporate social responsibility win

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is of key importance to many consumers, especially millennials. One survey noted that 75 percent of millennials are willing to take a pay cut if it means working for a company that is environmentally and socially responsible.

Also, 86 percent of consumers in the United States expect companies to be engaged in some form of CSR or activism. Overhauling an office to implement sustainable business practices is not only a great way to boost positive brand

perception, but it will also continue to generate a positive ROI for years to come.

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What are green practices businesses can adopt?

With so many aspects to running a green office, it’s overwhelming to know where to start. Since you’re not likely to read this piece and immediately knock down walls or tear up the flooring, there are a few steps you can take to migrate your business toward a greener office.

1. Reduce the number of printers in the office.

If companies make printing more inconvenient, people are less likely to do it. Obviously, this isn’t ideal if you have a department that relies heavily on printing. In that case, slowly transition employees over to a digital document management system and equip them with access to pdf editors and the proper tools before you take away printers.

2. Go green with procurement.

Source the least environmentally damaging goods. If you run an ecommerce business, consider eco-friendly packaging made of 100 percent recycled content. Take a page out of the ultimate eco-friendly playbook and encourage customers to reuse original packaging for returns.

3. Switch to paperless statements.

Most financial institutions and vendors offer paperless statements. Making the switch to digital statements reduces the quantity of paper mail. And, it’s much harder to lose an

email than a paper statement.

4. Implement a digital signature policy.

With e-signature tools available on most word processors and document management systems, there’s no reason to require wet signatures. E-signing documents save both space and resources.

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5. Toss out your fax machines.

Say goodbye to the office dinosaur. Digital documents are secure, and PDF editors have made it easy to edit documents and forward them to the appropriate party.

Making these changes (even one of them) is a huge first step and a great way to reduce costs and impact. With the money your company will save from going paperless or even reducing your paper use, you can transition your office into a green workspace.

Don’t have a physical office space? Get creative. Implement sustainable practices into your home office or telecommute as a way to reduce your footprint.

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